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ABSTRACT

Serving in a program evaluation at Cornell University's Center for International Studies by holding the unique position of participating in three distinct capacities: first, as the administrator of the center's undergraduate program; second, as a teacher in one of its courses; and third, as a member of the evaluation team, functioning as an intellectual historian with the task of recreating the historical context of the undergraduate program, the evaluator reviews her progress. She focuses on disciplinary and professional realizations and changes. (Author/BJG)

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IMPACTS ON AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORIAN

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In this paper I shall detail some of the more significant impacts upon me resulting from my involvements in a rather extensive program evaluation. I use the word involvements rather than involvement for, amongst all the speakers in this group, I hold the unique position of having participated in the evaluation in three distinct capacities: first, as the administrative coordinator of the Center for International Studies' undergraduate program; second, as a teacher in one of its courses; and third, as a member of the evaluation team, functioning as an intellectual historian with the task of recreating the historical context of the undergraduate program. Having intersected the evaluation as an administrator, a teacher, and a historian, the impacts were many and varied. Having functioned as both the evaluated and the evaluator, I had the experience of viewing evaluation from both outside and in. My focus will be on two classes of impacts, the disciplinary and the professional, for the reason that it was in these two areas that the influence of the evaluation process upon me was greatest.

During the academic year 1972-73, I was a third-year graduate student in a doctoral program in history at Cornell University, where my major field of study was Modern European Intellectual History. In the fall of 1972 I became coordinator of the Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Program in International Studies. On being inter-

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viewed for the position, I was told my role would be largely administrative: handling the procedural, paperwork side of offering courses. In addition, I was informed that CIS' experimental undergraduate interdisciplinary program in International Studies would be undergoing an extensive evaluation this year, and it would be my job to serve as liaison between CIS and the evaluators, providing them with all the information they would require on past, present, and future undergraduate courses in the program.

Up until the time I assumed this position, my only experience with evaluation was as an undergraduate student who, like other undergraduates, received questionnaires at the end of a semester for the purpose of course evaluation. I recall thinking then that this was a good procedure since it offered the potential of benefiting both future students taking the course and the professor giving it. However, the extent of my interest in and knowledge about the field of education evaluation did not reach beyond such questionnaires and a basic belief in the value of the evaluative enterprise.

I first began to learn about the substantive and methodological aspects of evaluation when, as program coordinator, I, along with the evaluator, Whiton Paine, sat in on the weekly staff meetings of the undergraduate course presented that fall. The evaluation's underlying assumptions, its techniques, and its goals were driven home to me in a rather explicit way from the start. Since the evaluation met with skepticism and resistance from a professor on

this teaching team, the very nature of educational evaluation, its value, validity, and the question of its interference or non-interference in the course undergoing its scrutiny, were being raised. It was as an administrator, then, that I was introduced to the field of educational evaluation; both in concept and in the form of practical application. And since in my role as administrative coordinator of the undergraduate program I was at the service of the program's teachers, students, and evaluators and had sustained contact with all three, I was sensitized to their varying attitudes toward and reactions to the evaluation.

As my role shifted from administrator to teacher, my relationship to the evaluation changed. Formerly a close observer, I was now one of the evaluated, having become a member of the teaching staff of the next undergraduate course. While continuing as program coordinator, I led a weekly two-hour discussion section in a course which focussed on problems of nations with a multi-racial and/or multi-ethnic population. While performing the role of teacher, the evaluation had significant professional impacts upon me, predominantly upon the development of my skills as a teacher.

This was my first teaching experience and I was to benefit greatly from the expertise of the evaluator. After what appeared to me to be an unsuccessful discussion section in the early weeks of the course, I approached the evaluator. He had observed my teaching sessions and indicated a willingness to make available to me data he had accumulated on teacher-student interactions in my discussion

section along with his interpretations of this data. Through this consultation, I came to better understand which of my teaching techniques and what in my teaching style proved effective, what ineffective, and why. Utilizing video tapes of the class together with his personal observations, the evaluator pointed out things I had been doing in the classroom of which I was totally unaware. On numerous occasions, when either my authority or the accuracy of my position on an academic issue was being challenged by a student, I would counter by assuming a highly intellectualized posture -- citing scholarly theories in the defense of my position and presenting them in a rather esoteric vocabulary. Armed now with an awareness and a greater understanding of my teaching behavior and assured by the evaluator that despite certain weaknesses, I displayed strong abilities as a teacher, I was given the valuable criticism and encouragment that enabled me to develop my teaching skills. By the end of the course, the evaluation indicated vast improvement in the levels of learning and enjoyment experienced by both students and teacher in my discussion section.

Serving in the capacity of consultant to the individual teachers and to the teaching staff as a whole, the evaluator proved an invaluable resource to a successful performance of the teaching function. The introduction by the evaluator of the findings of educational researchers on a host of curriculum-related matters into

weekly staff meetings conducted for preparation of the undergraduate course proved extremely useful in the construction of the curriculum. And once the course was in progress, the teaching staff benefitted from feedback of the evaluator's data on the students' reception of different kinds of lecture presentations, class formats, reading selections, and the use of audio-visual aids. We had almost instantaneous information on what was working well and what was not, and hence, the opportunity to make corrections.

But it was in my third role, as historian of the undergraduate program, that my involvements with the evaluation was to have what I presently judge to be the most profound and far-reaching set of impacts. For it was while functioning as the historian on the evaluation team that I underwent both a confirmation of certain ideas and attitudes and significant changes in others which I held as an historian and an educator. These include an altered perspective on my discipline and on disciplinary-based education in general and changes which occurred when, acting as an historian, I was forced to make a reappraisal of my thinking on the nature of historical research, its assumptions, goals, and methods. In addition to this combination of disciplinary and intellectual impacts, there were professional ones as well. In doing the historical study, I was applying the assumptions and techniques of intellectual history to institutional history and in the process I developed new skills and refined others. These impacts will reveal themselves as I describe why an undergraduate history was done and how it was done.

In the Spring of 1973, Whiton Paine was grappling with the problem of how, as an evaluator trained in psychology and educational research, he could arrive at an adequate account of both the historical setting and the historical development of the program he was evaluating. Not only was he not an historian, but the kind of historical research he envisioned required the services of someone with training in the history of ideas. What, he wanted to know, was the original conception of the undergraduate program, how was it born, and what were the factors which reshaped this idea, forcing it to undergo an evaluation into its present form? Since I was familiar with both the evaluation and the progrmm and I was trained as an intellectual historian, I was a likely candidate to undertake the history.

My task was to recreate the historical context of the undergraduate program with a focus upon its underlying assumptions and the transformations they had undergone. But the context of an educational program, I soon found, was quite different from the context of an idea, an intellectual figure, or an intellectual circle, the usual focus of the historian of ideas. University-based, the program's context was institutional, and recreating this context took me into a field of history with which I was totally unfamiliar -- institutional history. In addition to learning something about the nature and practice of institutional history, in undertaking the undergraduate project I was embarking upon a rather uncharted and little-developed area of study: the application of the techniques of the intellectual historian to

institutions rather than to their customary target of inquiry.

My first major problem was to define the scope of the program's relevant institutional context. The Center for International Studies was the primary institutional focus of my study. Soon, however, it became clear that the history of the undergraduate program required an ever-broadening context if one were to understand its evolution. The Center itself had to be provided with a context if its institutional behavior was to be made comprehensible. An understanding of the university as an institution, its organization into colleges and departments, and the functions of these structural components, became essential if one were to make sense of the problems faced by the Center for International Studies in establishing and continuing an interdisciplinary academic program for undergraduates. Further, just why the undergraduate program should have developed when it did, with its particular subject content and its particular format, required a broadening of the notion of context to include institutional interactions beyond the level of the university; that is, context had to take account of interactions between institutions with which the university dealt -- private foundations and the federal government.

The focus on the evolution of an idea as it is given institutional expression required that I have recourse to a wholly new set of source materials than I had been accustomed to working with. Day-to-day memoranda and letters of CIS and university figures, minutes of meetings and university reports became my source materials. I developed an appreciation for archival research, something I must admit the historian of ideas very often lacks, as in my case, she surrounds

herself with the works of a few great thinkers.

This first professional application of my historical training became, in effect, a test and revision of implicit assumptions I held about the role that could be played by ideas. My research led me to the conclusion that the forces which shaped the formation and evolution of CIS' Undergraduate Program was a mix of factors that were in constant flux -- the interaction of institutional constraints, ideas, and personalities. Taken alone, no single factor was determinative. Taken in combination, at different points in time, different factors seemed more significant in effecting the outcome of events than others. My research seemed to confirm in my mind the validity of a theoretical and explanatory framework I had adopted as a graduate student -- Max Weber's theories of historical cuasation and his methodology of the social sciences. One could only speak in terms of "probable" causes and "hypothetical" reconstructions. Events were the product of a myriad of forces coexistent at any one point in time. Certain of these were more instrumental than others -- these being "adequate" causes. The experience of doing the undergraduate program history further confirmed in my own mind that history was far from being a science; recreation of events where human intentions played a major role was at best a creative exercise of the historian. And the historian, even when his source materials were primarily written documentation, was still always the interpreter and not the mere recorder of facts. Indeed, incchoosing what was the significant and what the irrelevant documentation, he was the maker of "facts". How sacrosanct,

then, were historical "facts", if they, too, were the products of interpretation?

In addition to leading me to undertake a reevaluation of my conception of history as a discipline, my involvements with the evaluation led me to rethink what I had for such a long time taken for granted and left unquestioned -- the very structuring of knowledge into disciplines and its transmission in this form. The undergraduate program was an interdisciplinary enterprise, hence it raised this question for me from the start. First, as an outsider viewing an educational venture in an abstract way, as a purely intellectual problem;, then, when I, as a teacher, attempted to impart knowledge to others, the problem became concrete and existential. A purely political or economic or historical approach to racial problems was at best partial. Teaching about racial domination as a solely political or economic phenomenon was one way to approach the problem, but it was just one angle. Political and economic analysis required supplementation by historical, anthropological, and psychological analysis. Problems in the social sciences and humanities are rarely open to solution by the application of knowledge from the perspective of one discipline alone. Problem-solving in these areas requires the decompartmentalization of knowledge, since problems of poverty and underdevelopment and an understanding of social and political movements are never purely political or economic phenomena. We are aware of the dangers of an uncritical use of language -- how a word is merely used to name the thing, but soon usurps it. The word becomes reified,

as if it were in fact the reality. The tool we employ to help us become better acquainted with reality becomes itself the reality. So, too, with a purely disciplinary approach to knowledge. The economic or social theory enlisted to aid us in our understanding of reality is viewed as the reality before us. Different disciplines become competing realities.

As an instructor in the undergraduate program, I learned that interdisciplinarity offers an alternate approach, and, I believe, a more valid and valuable one. It pictures complementary realities where economic, anthropological, historical, psychological, and sociological interpretations exist side-by-side. It offers the possibility of an integrative interpretation, one drawing on the analytic tools and explanatory frameworks of all these perspectives.

In my role as the historian member of ar interdisciplinary evaluation team, the value of interdisciplinary collaboration was further driven home to me. In discussing the conclusions of my research with other members of the team, familiarization with their perspectives pointed up what I came to view as my improper weighting of significant factors that shaped the evolution of the undergraduate program . Trained in a discipline which emphasized the importance of a particular type of interconnection to events and a particular brand of analysis, I was insensitive to the role played by other forces. A more accurate history would require additional analysis from other perspectives.

My involvements with the evaluation, then, resulted in a

variety of impacts. I believe they can best be summarized with the statement that the experience has made me a better teacher and a better historian. If I am now an educator who has become more aware of the problematic nature of the educational enterprise, I am also one with an awareness of how to attack some of the difficulties faced by one who seeks not simply to impart knowledge, but to provide students with a learning that is useful; that is, relevant to improving their lives and the lives of others. I am convinced, as well, that there is great value to educational evaluation. As an undergraduate filling out questionnaires, I was convinced of this too; but at that time, I did not know quite why.